DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 365 PS 023 434

AUTHOR Matzye, Carolyn
TITLE Parental Involvement in Middle Schools.
PUB DATE 1 Jun 95
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Educational Strategies; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; *Parent Participation; Parent Student Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Peer Relationship; Social Development; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Parent Teacher Association

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of parent involvement in middle schools, focusing on the increasing need for such involvement in today's society. It examines the development of the parent-student and teacher-student relationship, and considers the importance of the parent-teacher relationship in relation to the student's development and education. The paper then discusses the student peer relationship and its role in fostering social development. It also discusses one teacher's experiences as a first-year middle school teacher, observing that parental involvement played a key role in academic attainment, interest in schoolwork, and social development. It argues that the development of an effective parent teacher association (PTA) or parent teacher organization (PTO), as well as effective and regular teacher-parent communication, is very important in fostering parental involvement at the middle school level. (MDM)

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Parental Involvement In Middle Schools

Carolyn Matzye

Department of Education

Youngstown State University

June 1, 1995

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Parental Involvement in Middle Schools

Parental involvement in middle schools is an important issue that has grown throughout the years. With all the changes in our society and families, the need for parental involvement has increased tremendously. "Parental involvement is essential if schools are to successfully educate the whole child" (Cooper, Uebbing 52). There are many ways for parents to get involved in their child's education. For example, parents can get involved in PTA/PTO, school visits, written or oral communication, helping with homework, and banquets or award ceremonies. This strong support and involvement will have a positive influence, not only on the student, but on the teacher and the parent as well.

A student's self-esteem and confidence will begin to build itself up as the parents involvement continues. They start to realize that their parents really do care about their education and are proud of them no matter how small their accomplishment. This develops a good attitude and a desire to do good in the student keeping them motivated in school. This motivation keeps the students interested in their subjects so they can develop a better understanding of the concepts taught. "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement" (Kasting, 146).

As a result of this caregiving and interest several relationships begin to mature. A student to parent relationship which creates an excellent sense of caring, trust, and communication.

A student to teacher relationship which helps keep the students motivated and interested in their subjects. Also a parent to teacher relationships develops setting a good example for the students to follow. And the last relationship to form is a student to student relationship where they can exercise what they've learned while socially interacting with their classmates.

The first of the relationships to form is a student to parent relationship. This relationship shows how the child and the parent have earned each others trust and how a strong bond has grown between them. Because of this trust, communication, the key to a relationship, becomes present in most situations. With all the peer pressure and stereotypes, communication plays as important role in the middle school child's life. "Middle school students do desire parental support, as it is a central source of stability in their turbulent lives" (Renihan, Renihan, 59).

Along with the student to parent relationship a student to teacher relationship also evolves. The student and the teacher learn to respect each others opinion when communicating in the classroom. Wanting to please the teacher, as well as their parents, the students become very eager to participate in each days lessons. They will come to class prepared and raring to go. For example, in my own classroom, I had a student who had trouble completing work assignments. One week the student completed all the assignments given and received a great deal of recognition from myself and their parents. From that point on they were the first one in the room waving their completed

work in the air for all to see. Knowing the student's great interest in learning and the parent showing they care, this gives the teacher a great sense of accomplishment. The parent also seeing their child highly motivated to learn, helps create a good parent to teacher relationship.

This relationship, parent to teacher, is also very important in the education and development of a child. In a good parent to teacher relationship the attitude of the teacher and the parent become very positive. Being able to discuss the strenghts and weaknesses of their child and ask the teacher questions gives the parent a relaxed and comfortable feeling. After speaking with several middle school teachers they all agree that if you keep the parents of your students well informed of their child's progress the more secure they feel and the more involvement you will see. "In recent years, several research studies have indicated that the benefits of parental involvement include raising achievement levels and improving the attitude of parents towards schools and teachers" (John, 16). This parent involvement also keeps the teacher aware of the changes and different values in their student's families. "Unless educators evalute their own beliefs about what constitutes a family and dramatically change the way they link to students' families, the middle school philosophy and curriculum will be a movement without impact" (Mack, 55). Working together with the teacher gives the parent a sense of community. Being involved in preparing their child with the proper communication and problem solving skills they see necessary, gives the parent a feeling

of belonging and responsibility. The more a parent knows about what their child is learning, who's teaching it, and who their friends are, the more safe and secure they feel. When the child begins to sense this secure feeling given off by their parents, they too will then feel more at ease when interacting and participating in school.

The last relationship to form as a product of the others is a student to student relationship. This tie between students has a positive influence on their social interaction. By modeling their parents and teacher, they are able to communicate with their classmates in an acceptable manner. They respect each others opinions and learn to help each other out when in need. When I asked a seventh grade math teacher what the importance of good social interaction was he said, "If you allow students to communicate in the classroom they build a good rapport with each other and will not be afraid to ask another peer for help." With these fine qualities the students are able to make friends and build their self-confidence constituting a home-school atmosphere. It's obvious that if the student, teacher, and parent all contribute and make an effort to be involved in schooling the more functional and progressive the educational out come.

After completing my first year teaching at the middle school level the above have proved to be true. When working with my students it's plain to see the difference in academic attainment in the students whose parents are involved in their education as compared to those whose parents aren't involved. The student's whose parents are involved showed greater interest in lessons,

determination to do well, and were more socially active. On the other hand, the students whose parents weren't involved showed a lack of interest in lessons, and could care less whether they did good or not. It seemed if the students felt no one cared then why should they. Socially they were either totally withdrawn or they bullied their classmates around. One young boy in my class was not only a bully, but the bully of the entire school. In this case there was no parental involvement at all. He didn't care if his work was done or not and to get attention he picked a fight with everyone. Now his cousin who is also in my class is the opposite. His mother belongs to the PTO and is very active in school activities. He is very well mannered and does his homework on time. Socially, he has many friends and is always ready to lend a helping a hand. There are many ways we can get parents involved in their child's schooling so we don't have students who think education isn't important.

One way to keep parents involved in education is the organization of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). These groups of parents help put together fundraising ideas so students can go on field trips, have class parties for academic excellence and holidays, and also become the audience for science fairs, art exhibits, and other school programs held throughout the year. They also have banquets and award ceremonies to acknowledge the students academic and athletic achievements. These all help to produce a positive attitude and high self-esteem in children at a middle school level.

Another way to keep parents involved would be through communication. The teacher can set up regular meetings with parents to inform them of their child. This can be done through classroom visits, open houses, parent's night, and parent teacher conferences. Classroom visits and open house allows the parent to become familiar with the classroom atmosphere, the teacher, and the skills that are being taught. Parents night is a good way to acknowledge the parents for support and participation. This recognition keeps parents interested and wanting to come back. Parent conferences are also a source used for informing parents about their child's educational progress. This also can be done with newsletters, notes, phone calls, or a school newspaper. All of these are good ways to keep parents involved in the development and education of their children.

In conclusion, I feel the more parents are involved in the education of their children the more successful schooling will be. It's quite clear that parental involvement positively effects students self-esteem and helps form many healthy relationships. It's quite evident that parental involvement is very beneficial in the education and developement of a child. Parental involvement increases academic achievement, motivation, social activity, and self-esteem in students. It also helps form healthy relationships between student and parent, student and teacher, parent and teacher, and student and student. Sharing the responsibility of educating our children will help create a home-like atmopshere where we can learn and grow educationally and socially together.

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